



Christopher Caudwell, 1907 – 1937

## Violence

The [Communist Manifesto](#) of 1848 ends:

*“The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the **forcible** overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!”*

Earlier, it says:

*“the **violent** overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat.”*

When it comes to the expropriation of the expropriators, the working class will not ask permission.

The proletarian revolution will be an act of force, with no appeal, and *in that sense* it is bound to be a violent revolution, which *does not mean* that bloodshed is necessary.

Blood need not be shed. But the revolution will make its own laws. Otherwise, it would not be a revolution.

### **Bourgeois violence**

The bourgeoisie is a violent class. It acquired its position by bloody violence and it maintains its position by constant applications of physical violence and bloodshed. It is the bourgeoisie that invented permanent standing armies, the permanent police force, and the prisons, all of which are in constant use.

In spite of all of its protestations to the contrary, the bourgeoisie is not afraid of physical confrontation. It is well prepared for bloody violence.

What the bourgeoisie fears is not bloodshed, but the other kind of violence: that of unilateral expropriation of the means of production, distribution and exchange. The bourgeoisie fears the violence that takes, not blood, but property.

## Caudwell

In the previous parts of this series, we have read Clausewitz, Marx and Lenin on the political/military nature of violence. In this part we will take an essay of Christopher Caudwell (attached; download linked below) so as to establish the moral and/or philosophical basis of [Pacifism and Violence](#), if any such can be found.

[Christopher Caudwell](#) (1907 – 1937) wrote some extraordinary communist literature that was only published after he was killed while fighting the fascists in the Spanish Civil War, as an internationalist from England, and as a member of the International Brigades.

Much of Caudwell's best work was published posthumously under the famous title: "[Studies in a Dying Culture](#)". Three of the essays can be found in the [Caudwell section of the Marxists Internet Archive](#), including his essay "[On Liberty](#)", which contains the statement: *"I am a communist because I believe in freedom!"*

Another Caudwell collection was published more recently in hard copy under the title "The Concept of Freedom".

## Sheehan

Another source of Caudwell material (including the image above) is Helena Sheehan's web site, where Helena has made a [Caudwell centenary page](#) that is very moving, and will tell you many reasons why Christopher Caudwell is remembered with such passion and love even now, so long after his death.

In “Pacifism and Violence” Caudwell asks almost at once:

*“Are we Marxists then simply using labels indiscriminately when we class as characteristically bourgeois, both militancy and pacifism, meekness and violence? No, we are not doing so, if we can show that we call bourgeois not all war and not all pacifism but only certain types of violence, and only certain types of non-violence; and if, further, we can show how the one fundamental bourgeois position generates both these apparently opposed viewpoints.”*

What do you say when you are confronted by a pacifist follower of M K Gandhi, or by a Quaker? This text can assist you. Today’s downloadable text will help bring the essence of the question into our dialogue.

This text will show you why it is that communists are not pacifists, although we struggle for peace, and why the bourgeoisie can never be peaceful, even when they call themselves pacifists.

- The image of Christopher Caudwell reproduced above was painted by [Caoimhghin O Croidheain](#)
- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Pacifism and Violence, 1938, Christopher Caudwell](#).
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).